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SUBJECT: Goma Report September 30: North  
Kivu Commander Sees Weakened CNDP

¶1. (SVB) Summary: General Rawat told facilitation team September 30 that after a month of fighting, CNDP appeared to have weakened, but there was still no likely military solution. Chief of army staff Kayembe told him he was amenable to direct military talks between CNDP and Etumba. EU rep Dumont said Etumba also did not foresee a military solution but many hardliners were pushing for one. EU Special Envoy van de Geer arrives Goma Saturday October 4, without assurances Nkunda will receive him. End summary.

¶2. (SVB) As of late afternoon September 30 there had been no renewed fighting during the day in North Kivu, according to North Kivu brigade briefing. However, on the evening of September 29, CNDP made an attack south of Tongo against FARDC forces now holding that strategic town, which was captured by FARDC in recent days after CNDP had withdrawn. FARDC ward off the CNDP probe, with two CNDP and two FARDC killed. FARDC now has a battalion's strength in Tongo (500-600 men, with two companies brought in from the east and four from the north, but commanded by Col. Delphin Kahimibi, in charge of the Rutshuru sector). In Ituri, the rebel group FPRI (only sporadically active over the past year) attacked a FARDC position at Tcheyi with a force of 500 men. These were driven back by MONUC, which used two attack helicopters and fired 34 rockets, but FPRI retook the FARDC position afterward. Meanwhile, MONUC headquarters had to shut down for much of the day following a road accident outside the headquarters, in which a MONUC military vehicle hit a motorcycle taxi with resultant fatality. A large stone-throwing crowd quickly gathered, led by angry motorcycle taxi drivers.

¶3. (SVB) North Kivu brigade commander Brigadier General Bipin Rawat met the facilitation team in the late afternoon September 30 for an in-depth assessment of the military situation after a month of fighting. He said that CNDP appeared to have "weakened quite a bit, and they know it." He judged that the FARDC's use of heavy weapons at Sake and Rugari might have discouraged the CNDP, and a very important factor was that FARDC had not consistently run away (for example at Tongo), as had typically been the case in previous military encounters. It was possible, he speculated, that CNDP was suffering leadership difficulties. However, he did not believe that FARDC would be able to defeat CNDP militarily. If FARDC knew how to use its attack helicopters efficiently the story might be different, he noted.

¶4. (SVB) Rawat said that he had earlier met FARDC Chief of Army Staff General Kayembe, who was in a "bullish" mood (consistent with his statements to the press that "CNDP is demoralized and weakened"). He told Kayembe, on the basis of the meeting September 29 between deputy commander Col. Negi and CNDP officers near Bunagana, that CNDP appeared willing to negotiate directly with the government through the international facilitation, and he urged Kayembe to seek such a meeting. (Note: The CNDP officers in fact said that CNDP rejected military-to-military talks, but Rawat chose to see CNDP's position in a more positive light.) Kayembe objected to the CNDP demand that both sides withdraw to positions pre-August

28, saying that the focus should be on MONUC's proposed zones of separation.

¶5. (SVB) Rawat said he emphasized to Kayembe that FARDC's numerous ceasefire violations over the past two weeks (much more numerous and severe than CNDP's) had greatly complicated the effort to promote dialogue over the disengagement plan. FARDC's capture of Tongo was a particularly serious breach and would be difficult to overcome. Kayembe gave assurances that FARDC would withdraw from Tongo, but only after CNDP fully withdrew from Kanombe within the Rutshuru corridor. Rawat told him that CNDP appeared not only to have re-withdrawn from Kanombe but also to have withdrawn from the sensitive position of Himbi Heights above Rugari. Kayembe said that he had given direct orders to all his commanders in North Kivu to cease all attacks. (Note: Rawat stated that he had heard this promise repeatedly from Kivus commander General Lukama, and it was not clear how effective Kayembe's order would be, as the colonels in charge of the concerned sectors appeared to have direct channels to hard-line elements in Kinshasa. End note.)

¶6. (SVB) Rawat said that Kayembe, in the end, agreed that there could be military-to-military talks with CNDP. He said that General Didier Etumba (co-chairman of the Joint Technical Commission) would be the appropriate person to conduct such talks. Etumba was now in Kinshasa but would return to Goma in two days.

¶7. (SVB) Deputy Chief of Staff Col. Cunliffe remarked that, if such talks went forward, Etumba could be the wrong person, as he tended to harp on the Amani model, which was now anathema to CNDP. He suggested that such talks would proceed more positively under either General Mayala or General Lukama, both of whom had a better grasp of

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military realities on the ground.

¶8. (SVB) EU representative Jean-Michel Dumont revealed that he had had a conversation with Etumba the previous day, in which Etumba stated that he did not believe a military solution was possible against CNDP. Etumba regretted that there were many hard-liners, both in North Kivu and Kinshasa, who believed now was the moment to go after CNDP militarily. Etumba said that, as for himself, he understood the need to continue to seek dialogue with CNDP and make some concessions. Dumont concluded that Etumba might, indeed, be the best person to conduct such talks.

¶9. (SVB) Dumont said that European Union Special Envoy Roeland van de Geer would return to Goma on Saturday October 4. He would seek an early opportunity to speak to Rawat and to Etumba, and he would hope to see Nkunda. Dumont saw Nkunda's letter of September 23 to SRSG Doss as possibly less rigid than most of the recent CNDP pronouncements, although it was by no means clear that Nkunda would receive van de Geer. Rawat welcomed van de Geer's arrival as excellently timed.

¶10. (SVB) Rawat noted that the following day, October 1, MONUC would be accompanying a FARDC "strong patrol," with MONUC/DDRRR presence, into northern North Kivu to apprehend FDLR elements. The FARDC unit, he said, would come from Sake. He hoped this effort would be useful in sending a signal to CNDP that MONUC and FARDC continued to be serious in their anti-FDLR campaign.

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